

SEA-BIRDS.

BY HECTOR A. STUART.

Through the deep embrasure,  
Towards the distant azure,  
Gaze I o'er the purple colored sea,  
Where the white gulls sailing  
Restless, wildly wailing,  
Seem like ghostly messengers to me.

Spirits of the ocean,  
Wild as is its commotion,  
Moaning o'er the foaming harbor-bar;  
Bearing many a token,  
Many an image broken,  
Many a tribute from the climes afar.

Many a tale of sorrow,  
Such as life may borrow  
From the deepest founts of misery;  
Such as wounding ever,  
Time can soften never,  
Ever growing in severity.

Such as ceaseless haunteth  
(Which no power avaunteth)  
Those who like me feel its energy,  
When beneath its anguish  
Every joy may languish—  
Blighted by one upas memory.

Then betimes a-sighing  
Like a sea-moan dying,  
Sweeps across the sorrow-musing mind,  
And remembrance waking  
Like a dead sea breaking,  
Rolls her sullen wave with grief inclined,

Say, ye birds unquiet,  
Charged with misery's fiat,  
Circling o'er the chanting coral-bar—  
Bear ye not some tidings,  
In your mournful chidings,  
From a form beneath the surge afar?

Bring ye not one token  
From an idol broken,  
Ay, one whisper from a spirit fled—  
From a dream whose dirges  
Chant the sea-grown surges  
Tolling round Samoa's rifted head?

Bear ye not one token  
From a vision broken,  
Ay, one whisper from that fateful shore,  
Which like sunlike breaking,  
Joy from sadness waking,  
May these ghostful shadows banish ever-  
more?

RUTH IN THE GARDEN

I.

Poor little Ruth! On a bright wintry morning she was wandering about like a timid creature of the woods, driven to despair by some mysterious act of cruelty. Hither and thither among the glades and dells of the beautiful garden she had learned to look upon as her own, she walked to and fro, hating it because she was soon to be expelled—an outcast, an alien, yet innocent. Except a little fit of petulance or caprice now and then, she could not accuse herself of having wronged the parent by whom she had been adopted and just now disinherited. Would it not be best to die, seeing that she had no longer a home, no longer a protector, no longer a duty? But how was she to die? A man would have courage to shoot himself, or get his dues by force, or at least he might win back all that he had lost. She could do none of these things, and she despised herself for such helplessness. There was surely no sadder figure for the winter sun to look upon than this despairing little maiden of eighteen; yet there was something to smile at too, for you felt that a very little would dry those angry tears, and check those passionate sobs. The impotent indignation of very small creatures has ever its comic as well as tragic side. She saw somebody coming towards her through the trees, and ran, bird-like, a few steps forwards, as if to escape from him; then seeing there was no help for it, stood still, trembling. "I will be proud and angry, as I have a right to be," she said to herself. "I loved Bertie as a brother yesterday, but I ought to hate him, and I do hate him now, since he is the new master here, and every bit of bread I eat from to-day is his charity."

The girl and youth met without a word—she downcast and pale, he flushed and eager.

"Ruth," he said in a voice full of joy and hope—"Ruth, have you no word of congratulation? Why, I thought you would be the first to rejoice in my good fortune; and, after all, does not good luck to me mean good luck to you?" And he stooped to kiss and caress her, but she drew back.

"How can you talk so?" she cried. "I may be helpless, but I have not a mean spirit. I would rather starve than be a burden upon you."

The young man's face, which was singularly candid and sweet in expression changed in a moment. He crimsoned, his large brown eyes filled with tears, his lips trembled.

"Oh! Ruth, how could you ever be a burden upon me? You must know what I mean. Our father by adoption felt sure that in making me his heir, he but divided his fortune between us. Don't you love me?"

She went on from one bitter speech to another, hardly hearing his words.

"What does it matter whom I love? I loved him, and he thought it no unkindness to let me be driven a beggar from his doors! I don't see that love has anything to do with it. I have to begin my life again without any help, and yours he had mapped out for you just as you wished it. Of course you are happy, and I am miserable."

"Ruth, only listen to me for a minute, and I can make you understand what I mean."

"I understand; there is no possibility of making a mistake," cried Ruth, with a burst of tears. "You were always generous, and you wish to make amends for the injustice shown to me, but I cannot be passed from hand to hand like a slave-girl. I have a will of my own."

For some time the youth was silent. At last he said very sorrowfully—

"Then I was wrong, and you never cared about me, Ruth, or else my good fortune is evil fortune indeed, if what has happened to-day has turned you against me."

She made no answer.

"Which is the truth?" he asked. "In fairness you are bound to tell me that."

But he could get no answer from her; his words had not softened her—rather the reverse, for she took the slight peremptoriness in his voice as an assumption of his new dignity. Never before had he talked to her of what was due to himself. They had been a pair of happy children till to-day, loving each other with no more thought of mutual obligation than young birds.

When she did speak, it was only to make matters worse, and they parted sorrowfully and bitterly.

It was a superb winter morning, and little by little the bright colours of cloudless sky, glossy ever-green, scarlet berry, and velvety turf, got into poor little Ruth's heart, cheering it and calming it. Every step recalled some kindness of the good man who had died a day or two ago. Here he had arranged a little garden for her, and filled it with such flowers as children love; there he had built a stable for her pony; in another place was her dovecote. One of his chief pleasures seemed to have been in pleasing her. She began to find excuses for that eccentric will of his, read only an hour ago, by which Bertie inherited all that he possessed. Even her doves and pony belonged to Bertie now! "He must have had some good reason for doing this," the child said to herself, and tried to divine what it could be. Well, what else could he have intended, but that Bertie should marry her some day? But things could never come right between Bertie and herself now; he was growing imperious and exacting already, and would not let his love be a mere piece of generosity and heroic self-sacrifice? She wished she had been less violent in her reproaches, for the sake of the dead, but she felt none, the less vindictive towards his heir. She would leave him to the full enjoyment of his new position, and would begin life anew without any help. Oh! what could she do to earn her bread? she thought, sitting down in a lonely spot to weep.

Meantime, Bertie was going over his new domains with alternate feelings of dismay and exhilaration. Ruth was the one person he loved best in the world, but he loved himself a little; and at twenty-one even real grief can be for a time absorbed in unexpected good fortune. When he left Ruth a few minutes ago, it was with the feeling that he should never care a straw for his magnificent possessions, would most likely leave them to take care of themselves, go abroad, and so on; but no sooner had he begun the survey of the superb old house, which had that day become his own, than his thoughts took a more cheerful turn.

It was one of those Elizabethan mansions that bear, both inside and out, the stamp of English character, having rich red walls of a thickness that appears cyclopean in these days; lofty rooms, well adapted for the massive furniture of our ancestors; liberal allowance of kitchens and cellars, in the recesses of which it would be easy to hide a disguised hero or a murdered enemy; and numerous 'nooks and corners fit to turn to any use, from a prison to a lady's boudoir. The late owner had been eccentric in many things, but consistent in his love of what is really and purely English. From the hall to the attic, the eye rested upon nothing that was not entirely patriotic, if we may apply the word to art, and good and satisfying was the result. The armour worn by English knights at Cressy and Poitiers, the picture painted by Reynolds and Gainsborough, the chests and coffers carved out of English oak, the well-filled library of English authors in sober brown and gold bindings—all these things were a new and fascinating aspect to him. If Ruth broke his heart, he would still do what behoved an English gentleman of the old school; and the boy's honest nature glowed with all kinds of enthusiasms and emotions. But Ruth would not break either his heart or her own. When the first passion of his disappointment was over, he felt sure she would see that all was wisely ordered for herself as well as for him.

II.

Exactly an hour from the time that Ruth and Bertie had parted, though it seemed an age to each, they met again. But under what a different aspect! Now it was the youth who looked crushed and heart-broken,—the girl, whose face was bright and sympathetic, Ruth felt now a little comforted as to her own affairs, but full of compunction for her treatment of him. After all, it was mean and petty to reproach him for wrong done by another. It was not his doing that he was suddenly a prince and she a beggar girl; and though there was no good fairy to

bring them together as in a story-book, they might be kind and pleasant to each other for old acquaintance's sake. So she was returning to the house determined to find him, and say how sorry she was for her naughty behaviour, when a sudden turn brought them face to face. She was so full of her penitence that she did not notice his pallor, and, holding out her hand, began eagerly—

"Dear Bertie, forgive me, for saying such hard things to you just now. I am very sorry. I can never accept anything from you; but I do rejoice in your prosperity, I do indeed, and I shall not take any harm, never fear."

"You don't know what a mockery all this is," he answered almost savagely, "I have nothing to bestow upon you, Ruth—not even a crust of bread. My prosperity had lasted just two hours, and now I am a beggar!"

He put his hand to his brow distractedly.

"It seems like a horrid nightmare, but it is the truth. Oh! Ruth, it is hard to be waked from such a dream. Since I left you I have been going over the old place and making all kinds of plans, not to please myself only, but others. I intended to build a room for our dear old tutor, so that I could have him to help and advise me always, and I saw in my mind's eye, new cottages for those capital fellows who nursed all their neighbours during the fever last year, and a lovely boudoir for you, for I thought in time you would rather live here with me than anywhere else. But I shall emigrate next week, and marry some savage woman—unless I shoot myself, which perhaps would be the best thing to do. A second will is found, revoking the first, and now not a half-penny comes to me."

Ruth's first thought was to comfort him.

"You will soon forget this disappointment, Bertie," she said gently. "Our dear father had doubtless some good reason for leaving his fortune elsewhere. We cannot say we are disinherited."

"But you are not disinherited!" cried Bertie. "The tables are turned, Ruth, with a vengeance; it is you who are rich—I who am a beggar now."

"Oh, Bertie, is that true?"

"You may well look aghast! Oh! it is too cruel. What can I do? My education is not finished; I have no friends; I have been accustomed to plenty of money all my life; and now I am thrown without warning on my own resources. But I forgot that I have not wished you joy of your inheritance, Ruth, pray forgive me."

Ruth was trying to put her thoughts into words, but found it difficult to begin. What did she care for this great fortune now, seeing that she was miserable? Yet, if she said so, how was he to believe her? He seemed to read the unspeakable longing for sympathy in her face, for he added—

"Don't be unhappy about me. I am a man, and you are a woman, and it is right that I should work and you should not. If I only knew how to set about it, I would not mind. But I won't be beholden to any one."

That stung her, for she was on the point of saying: "Forget the idle words I said. Take my love, if you will, and my fortune anyhow." Now she could not say that.

"Is everything left to me to do exactly as I like with it?" she asked.

"Not exactly; but everything is yours. There are trustees, of course."

"And would they prevent me from doing what I just?" she said in as business-like a voice as she could put on. "I mean, in making over half this property to you. He loved us both equally. We were alike his children, in everything but name and blood. I would rather have nothing than have all."

"This is childish," he answered impatiently. "Law is law, and it has made you mistress here. You cannot undo a dead man's will."

"Dear Bertie, we have always been good to each other till now. Why should any change of circumstances alter us in that? You wanted me to share your fortune, just as I want you to take half mine."

He laughed scornfully.

"And don't you remember what you said? I have not a mean spirit any more than yourself, and I would rather go to the gold-diggings than be a burden upon you. Had you cared for me as much as I thought, it could make no difference now. All that is over between us."

And it seemed, indeed, as if all was over between them. Their eyes met without a trace of the old fond playfulness and affection; their voices were cold and hard, every word divided them more and more.

It was winter in their young hearts as they walked back to the house. They were such mere children, their lives had been so careless and unclouded hitherto, that the one was no more fit to enter upon new responsibilities than the other. Ruth wanted to keep nothing but her doves, her flower-garden, and her pony, and had wept for the loss of them more than anything else. Now that everything was hers, mansion and park and treasures, she was too concerned to care about any. Hard as it had seemed to have to pack her little bundle to-morrow and go, it seemed twice as hard to see Bertie pack his, and leave her behind in her state alone!

In that ten minutes' silent walk how many thoughts flashed across her bewildered mind! Her part to play in life had hitherto been that of love and playfulness only. Nothing more was asked of her but to be happy. How could she ever be happy any more? Her old friend and protector was dead; her playfellow and boon companion was estranged;—who else could be to her what these two had been?

III.

They were met on the threshold by Bertie's tutor, who had been with the orphans during their trouble, and was now the dearest friend they had in the world. Ruth flung herself into his arms, but he put her away very gently and sorrowfully, saying that something most unexpected had happened, and that they were wanted in the library at once. They followed him: he downcast and apathetic, she absorbed and sorrowful. The family lawyer begged them to be seated, and looked somewhat embarrassed. He seemed to have something unpleasant to communicate now, for he looked first at the tutor, then at the youth and girl, then ran his eyes across a parchment before him, finally coughed, and began:—

"My dear young friends, in the entire course of my professional career—and such a survey leads me back upwards of thirty years—I never remember to have been so peculiarly placed as at the present moment. My position an hour or two ago was disagreeable enough. I had to break the news to one of you that your late kind friend and most generous protector had made no kind of provision for her in the future, doubtless for some inexplicable reason or other which we could not perceive. A short time after that, a later will was found, revoking the first, and entirely excluding his adopted son from any share of his ample fortune; and now we have come upon a third will, perfectly legal in form and substance, and of later date than all: and this is entirely contrary to the spirit of the two first. My late friend was, as we all know, eccentric; and he was so afraid of his intentions becoming known that he never employed me in drawing up testamentary documents, but a stranger in a distant part of the country. Well, it is now my duty to read this last and final disposition to you, first begging you to be prepared for tidings quite as unexpected, and perhaps even more distressing than any you have yet heard."

The lawyer put on his spectacles and read the entire paper:—

"In revoking all past wills and testaments—and I have made a great many—in favour of this final one, I have been actuated less by affection towards my adopted children than by a real interest in their welfare. I at first made Bertie my heir, because he was a boy, and it seemed right and natural to let him step into my place, and become my little Ruth's protector; then I gradually came to the decision that such a sudden accession of fortune and power might make him arrogant, and that to fight his own way in life would best strengthen his character, and fit him for the responsibilities of property which he might become possessed of by virtue of being Ruth's husband. And now I am led to make another alteration, partly being actuated by a desire of doing justice to another, and partly out of a real unselfish love for them." Here Ruth touched Bertie's hand. "They did not know that the estate I have enjoyed during the last half of my life only became mine because its rightful owner, my brother, was disinherited by our father on account of an improper marriage. He went to America, and there died; but I have lately learned that a son of his is living, and to him I bequeath what is only his due." Here Ruth touched Bertie's hand again, looking at him fondly, and almost joyfully. She felt as if a great weight was suddenly lifted from her heart. "Between my adopted children I have equally divided all the sums of money I have laid by from my income, which will be found a modest provision enough, but ample to complete Bertie's education and start him in life, and for my little Ruth a guarantee against need. Let them both learn to depend upon better things than wealth for happiness, and share what little they possess, not only with each other, but with many others. My advice to them is, provided they love each other, as I fondly imagine, to go to some new country where luxury has not yet encroached upon reason, and there lay the foundations of a new, simple, and useful life."

The lawyer laid down the document, and, taking off his spectacles, eyed the couple, half with commiseration, half with curiosity.

"I hope, my dear young friends," he said smiling, "that you will not give way to disappointment till we see how matters stand. My late client's economies may have been more extensive than we imagine, and in any case you are not penniless."

"What are we to do, Bertie?" asked Ruth confidingly; there seemed no reason why they should not consult each other now.

"Be friends, of course," the youth said, blushing as he stooped to kiss her. "Thank Heaven, I am no longer a fairy-tale prince, nor you a beggar-maiden, so we have nothing left to quarrel about."

The lawyer and the old man left them alone, and forgiving each other, without any more ado, for what at passed, they began to scheme their future. The sombre library all at once became an enchanted palace, for their talk was of unknown lands, where it would be good to build a hut and begin a new life together—of broad rivers running amid golden swards and purple hills, on which they might gaze and never tire. There was nothing to keep them in the old world, everything to draw them to the new. With the old confidence in each other, there returned also their affection and gratitude for their foster-parent. The winter day that had begun with such bitter disappointment to each, ended in bestowing abundant blessings on both, all the sweeter and more welcome because of the trouble which had gone before.